**EAHR 811 Response – Chapters 12, 13, and 14**

**SQ3R Technique**

As I began to survey and question the three chapters, I generated several questions for myself. From chapter 12, my main questions were what is involved in the divergent and the convergent phases of evaluation and how an evaluator’s professional judgment is used. From chapter 13, I had many questions but my main question was what activities/functions are common to all evaluation studies. Lastly in chapter 14, I was intrigued to learn what steps does an evaluator take to plan and carry out data collection and how does cost-benefit analysis differ from cost-effectiveness analysis. As I actively read through the chapters and began making comparisons to previous knowledge and readings, I began to find the answers to my questions.

**What is involved in the Divergent and Convergent Phases of Evaluation?**

According to the text, the divergent phase considers all possible questions and concerns and the convergent phase involves having only the most critical questions picked out and criteria developed for these questions.

* Divergent phase is used to obtain diverse viewpoints and a wide variety of sources must be considered including:
  + Questions and concerns of stakeholders
  + The use of the evaluation frameworks and heuristic approaches
  + Model, findings or salient issues
  + Professional standards, checklists, guidelines, instruments, or developed criteria
  + Views and knowledge of expert consultants
  + The evaluator’s own professional discretion (p.234).
* Convergent phase draws on Cronbach’s thinking in proposing six criteria for determining evaluation questions including:
  1. Who would use the information? Who wants to know?
  2. Would an answer to the question reduce uncertainty or provide not readily available information?
  3. Would the answer yield important information and/or have an impact on course events?
  4. Is the question merely of passing interest or does it focus on a critical dimension?
  5. Would the scope of the evaluation be affected if this question was dropped?
  6. Is it feasible to answer these questions (p. 248).

**How an Evaluator’s Professional Judgment is Used?**

According to the textbook, the evaluator’s primary responsibility is to gather and interpret information that can assist key individuals. Experienced evaluators are trained for describing the object of the evaluation in detail and looking at needs, costs, and consequences. They are skilled at being sceptics who raise insightful questions that otherwise may never be considered. Evaluators are hired for their knowledge and expertise. According to the reading, an experienced and insightful evaluator looking at a new project might create the following questions:

* Are the purposes the project is intended to serve really important? Are other more critical areas being left unattended?
* Are the goals, objectives, and project design consistent with the documented needs?
* Have alternative strategies been considered for accomplishing the project’s goals and objectives?
* Does the program serve the public good?
* What are some of the unintended side effects that might emerge from this program? (p. 244).

**What Activities/Functions are Common to all Evaluation Studies?**

According to Stufflebeam, the structure for determining evaluation design includes the following six functions:

1. Focusing the evaluation
2. Collecting information
3. Organizing information
4. Analyzing information
5. Reporting information
6. Administering the evaluation (p. 261).

**What Steps does an Evaluator take to Plan and Carry out Data Collection?**

The collection of valid information is fundamental to the success of evaluation. All evaluations should consider cost, precision, stability, relevance, validity, feasibility, political advisability, and acceptability of varying audiences. In most evaluations the following steps are followed for the collection of information: (p. 304)

1. Study the evaluation questions that have been developed and determine what information needs to be collected.
2. Develop or select an appropriate design for collecting information.
3. Consider sampling strategies where appropriate.
4. Identify appropriate sources and methods for collecting information and utilize multiple measures as required.
5. Develop procedures for collecting information.
6. Collect the information using appropriate checks.
7. Analyze the information.
8. Interpret the results and formulate evaluative conclusions.

**How does Cost-Benefit Analysis differ from Cost-Effectiveness Analysis?**

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| **Cost-Benefit Analysis** | **Cost-Effectiveness Analysis** |
| * Compares costs and benefits expressed in monetary terms of programs with different outcomes | * Compares the cost of programs designed to achieve similar outcomes |
| * Examined to see whether benefits exceed costs and the ratios of alternatives are compared | * Results in a ratio not expressed in monetary terms of the cost each program per outcome achieved |
| * Alternative with the highest benefit-to-cost ratio is selected | * Alternative with the highest units of outcome is selected. |

**PART II – Personal Response**

Based on this week’s readings, I am drawn to the information presented on cost analysis in chapter 14. As a person very driven by financial figures, I found it intriguing to learn that most program managers should not be expected to be skilled in identifying all the financial, human, or time costs associated with the programs they operate. Interestingly enough, the chapter outlines how educators and other public administrators are often faulted for picking a most expensive program out of various equally and effective programs, because the program of choice is packaged more attractively and advertised more widely. The chapter further goes on to outline that the real fault is in the program evaluation having failed to consider cost along with various other variables.

As an employee in the public sector, I have viewed how analyzing costs and benefits of various programs can be a complex undertaking. Generally, any program at SIAST has to yield a profit or at minimum a cost recovery must be achieved in order for the program to be offered. If the cost recovery is not met, the program is often cancelled, because it would create a huge financial burden to the organization.

In my specific area, a new program head was recently employed in August of 2008. This particular individual is a former math and statistics instructor. As a result, her cost analysis skills are superior. In fact, her cost analysis skills are so regimented that any adjustment in an instructor’s academic profile must be thorough analyzed and approved before any changes can be granted. For several of us this was a huge transition, because our previous program head was not a regimented in her cost analysis strategies. She was a former computer, anatomy, and psychology instructor so numbers did not drive her daily existence. Even though she was still proficient at maintaining adequate and successful budgeting tactics, her approach was very different. As an individual driven by financial figures, I appreciate the new program head’s style; however, I do find issues in rationalizing every schedule amendment when the reasoning is solely to promote better student learning.

Working under these two individuals has really broadened my knowledge with respect to budgeting and cost analysis. I am very appreciative of the two styles and also I am now more aware of SIAST’s protocols and procedures with respect to budgeting and cost-benefit analysis. Currently our program area has not undergone any form of program evaluation while I have been in this division. I am intrigued to participate in a formal program evaluation at some point in my career to see what factors are considered when the cost analysis portion happens. I am also intrigued to see how my new program head reacts during that stage of an evaluation, since numbers and statistics define who she is as an administrator.

**References**

Fitzpatrick, J.L., Sanders, J.R., & Worthern, B.R. (2004). *Program evaluation: Alternative approaches and practical guidelines.* Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.